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Letter dated 11 March 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government and further to my previous letters, the latest dated 26 February 1998 (A/52/808-S/1998/173), I have the honour to bring to your attention the following grave developments concerning the destruction of the cultural identity of the occupied part of Cyprus.

As you know, the protection, maintenance and restitution of all historic buildings belonging to all faiths in Cyprus, in both the free and Turkish-occupied areas, is of paramount importance to the Government of Cyprus because these historic buildings reflect the unique and varied history and culture of Cyprus.

The photographs enclosed* bear witness to the neglect, destruction and illegal conversion of these holy places and serve to demonstrate how the Turkish occupying forces in northern Cyprus are attempting to destroy historical evidence of Cyprus' diverse cultural identity.

Recently the following grave incidents, as illustrated in the photographs have come to our attention:

1. The ancient Church of Agia Marina in Diorios has been destroyed and is presently used as an animal shed (photographs 5 and 6).

2. The Church of Archangel Michael in Kazafani has been abandoned and allowed to deteriorate and is now in danger of collapsing (photograph 2).

* The photographs may be consulted at the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the United Nations.

3. The Church of Agia Marina in Bellapais has been transformed into a mosque (photograph 1).

4. The Church of Saint John in Mia Milia has been transformed into a mosque (photographs 3 and 4).

5. The Monastery of Panagia Apsinthiotissa in Sichari has been abandoned, looted and vandalized. Its precious frescoes have been destroyed (photographs 7, 8 and 9).

6. The Church of Agios Amvrosios in the village of Agios Amvrosios has been transformed into a mosque (photograph 10).

7. The Monastery of Antifonitis in Kalograia has been abandoned, its unique frescoes much damaged (photographs 11 and 12).

The repeated illegal conversions of churches and monasteries into mosques are in violation of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the Declaration on the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1966. These premeditated actions on the part of the Turkish occupying forces in northern Cyprus constitute an affront to civilization and grossly violate the basic human rights of the people of Cyprus, who are culturally and historically bound to these places of worship.

These latest developments are yet another cogent example of Turkey's disrespect for other people's cultural heritage and of the religious intolerance so evident in that country's modern history, and further illustrate Turkey's determination to violently alter the indigenous character of the occupied area of Cyprus. Disregarding all international agreements, violating basic tenets of civilization and desecrating what is sacred and holy to the people of Cyprus, Turkey is proceeding with a calculated, officially sponsored and well-executed plan to cause the disappearance of every trace of a civilization that flourished in these areas for more than 8,000 years.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, I wish once again to protest strongly against these wilful and deliberate acts of destruction and to request that you call upon Turkey to terminate its systematic policy of pillaging and obliterating the island's archaeological, historical and religious monuments.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sotirios ZACKHEOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative